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September 12, 2014

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Office of the Independent Inspector General
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Mary Robinson, Compliance Administrator
Office of the Compliance Administrator
69 West Washington, Suite 840
Chicago, IL 60602

RE: September 2014 Semi-Annual Report

Dear President Preckwinkle, Inspector General Blanchard and Ms. Robinson:

This is the fifth semi-annual report issued pursuant to the Employment Plan that was filed on March 19, 2012 and includes monitoring activities during the past six months. I will continue to lay the groundwork for the compliance program that is the foundation of the Employment Plan. The controls set forth in the Employment Plan are effective and ensure that non-exempt hiring and other employment actions are transparent and free from political influence. This report will be posted on the County's website as required by the Employment Plan.

Supplemental Policies:

The Office of the Independent Inspector General has been assisting me with monitoring the Supplemental Policies during this reporting period, and the County Auditor has joined our efforts to further create a strong, efficient and effective compliance program. We are in the process of conducting several reviews of the Supplemental Policies and the findings should be issued during the next reporting period.

The Supplemental Policies that are significant for monitoring purposes are overtime and compensatory time and discipline. At the beginning of my review of overtime in the Department of Facilities Management, I became aware that the County Auditor was also in the process of conducting a comprehensive review of overtime for the Department, which is why I reviewed only one title at a facility. I issued a report after I learned that the Department implemented a new policy and process for approval of overtime and concluded that I would conduct a further review of overtime to determine whether the implementation of the new policy and process complies with the Supplemental Policies.

To reinforce the importance of sending Disciplinary Action forms to the Bureau of Human Resources and me, a communication will be sent to Departments reminding them that the Bureau can provide guidance on disciplinary issues and that all Disciplinary Action forms must be processed per the Supplemental Policies.

During this reporting period, there have been two requests for Reclassification, one Voluntary Demotion and 38 Disciplinary Action forms sent to the Bureau of Human Resources and me. Three Interim Assignment Request extensions were approved, and two Interim Assignment Requests were granted. All related documentation and forms have been forwarded to the Compliance Administrator's Office and the Office of the Independent Inspector General and I will continue to train Departments and monitor implementation of the Supplemental Policies.

Training Status:

The 2014 online Annual Employment Plan Training has begun and should be completed by the end of the year. This year's training module is also designed with annual training requirements for the Department of Human Rights and Ethics and the Office of the Independent Inspector General. Supervisors/interviewers are required to take an additional module in order to remain certified to conduct interviews. Face-to-face training for new employees and supervisor/interviewers is conducted within 90 days of the start or promotion date and those employees who do not have a computer continue to be trained in person. To date, 320 employees have been trained in person.

Postings on Cook County's Website:

In March 2014, quarterly reports were posted on the County website for calendar year 2012 through the third quarter of 2013 as mandated by the Employment Plan. I anticipate that the additional quarterly reports will be posted soon. The Bureau of Human Resources website has consistently been updated to include amendments to the Employment Plan, Supplemental Policies, the exempt list with the names of employees holding exempt positions and exempt job descriptions. The certification process for exempt hires that was established in 2012 is being followed to ensure that persons appointed to these positions meet the minimum qualifications. Recently, additional documentation is being provided to support degrees, licenses, etc., that further shows the County's commitment to transparency in hiring.

Requests to Hire/Job Descriptions:

The Bureau of Human Resources processed approximately 139 Request to Hire forms during the last six months, of which I reviewed 36. Additionally, I reviewed approximately 49 job descriptions.

Randomizations:

During this monitoring period, 57 randomizations occurred with one issue that was identified and quickly resolved. Each Bureau of Human Resources Analyst has been provided the software to randomize and has been trained to conduct the randomizations for the positions they are assigned to fill. The Bureau of Human Resources Analysts have done a remarkable job with veteran's preference, which does not allow for randomizing this category of applicants, and randomizing the remaining pool of candidates. Therefore, I only monitored seven randomizations as I am provided the pre-randomized and randomized preliminary eligibility lists that I use to review validation steps.

Actively Recruited Positions:

On July 30, 2014, the Actively Recruited Positions list were amended; deleting titles that are now part of a collective bargaining unit and adding titles that meet the definition of the senior manager or professional/technical positions. The Actively Recruited Position Hiring Process allows Departments to review applications, without randomizing candidates, and to create interview lists. During this reporting period, I monitored three Application Review Panels from the Medical Examiner's Office, Public Defender's Office and Bureau of Human Resources. The Public Defender's Office conducted second interviews and the remaining Departments chose not to exercise that option. The process is working well with Departmental participation in the validation process.

Validation of Candidates/Interview Lists:

Since the last report, I have reviewed approximately 97 interview lists that the Bureau of Human Resources staff generated after reviewing online applications. I have noted previously that the Bureau of Human Resources staff does an exceptional job with this task and they continue to validate candidates without issue. "Dual" validation of technical minimum qualifications occurred on nine occasions with assistance predominantly from the Bureau of Technology.

Recommendation Letters:

Approximately 44 recommendation letters have been submitted to me and processed with some logged as political contacts and sent to the Office of the Independent Inspector General and Compliance Administrator's Office. One letter was non-compliant with the Employment Plan.

Interviews/Selection Meetings Monitored:

I have monitored some or all interviews for 17 job postings and attended 13 selection meetings. During this reporting period, candidates continue to arrive at interviews without required documentation, even though the posting provides notice of this requirement. Departments are reminding candidates to bring the required documentation when scheduling interviews. When candidates do not follow these instructions they are appropriately eliminated from further consideration. Please note that I have focused on reviewing hiring packets and examined 64 to ensure that paperwork processed at the end of a hiring sequence complies with the Employment Plan.

Several Departments had administrative staff and/or a Deputy Director attend interviews/selection meetings, which practice has stopped after discussions with the Directors. An "observer" or "note taker" does not serve a purpose and, in fact, can interfere with the structured hiring process.

I recently monitored an interview panel that did not score two candidates who were interviewed in order to completely fill out the Interviewer Evaluation form. I told them that they must score each candidate after every interview, which they did, and the forms were appropriately completed for the remaining five interviews conducted.

Complaints:

Since the last report, I issued three Incident Reports after investigations were completed. I initiated one investigation, one complaint was filed by an employee and a Bureau of Human Resources Analyst brought a non-compliance sequence to my attention.

Complaint # 14-001 was opened due to a letter that was sent to the President's Office and immediately given to me to review. The employee memorialized concerns regarding past interviews and applications for promotional opportunities within Cook County. The employee asked the President for assistance with hiring, which cannot occur for non-exempt positions. Many of the instances mentioned in the letter predated the Employment Plan and on one occasion the employee was appropriately placed on a randomized list which is why the employee was not interviewed. In this instance, there was technical non-compliance with the Employment Plan and the employee realizes that a letter for assistance with hiring/promotions is not a sanctioned step.

Complaint # 14-002 was opened to determine whether or not Section V, General Hiring, of the Employment Plan was violated. An internal applicant was not interviewed for a particular position and alleged that the validation process used a search of key words which improperly excluded the employee from eligibility to move to the next step. After reviewing the validation for the posting, the application did not reflect the employee's experience relative to a minimum qualification required for the position. The allegation was unfounded and the employee understands that validation includes meeting all minimum requirements for a vacancy that must be supported in the online application process.

Complaint # 14-003 involved several employees responsible for scheduling interviews and interviewing candidates. A candidate on an interview list who was unable to interview due to being hospitalized was "carried over" to the next hiring cycle. Ironically, a second interview list was sent to the Department and the candidate was allowed to interview with the next ten candidates. The finding was technical non-compliance with the Employment Plan as the employees' actions were not intentional. However, the rationale for adding a candidate to the second set of interviews was questionable. My recommendation was to provide refresher training to the employees. The training has been conducted.

On July 26, 2013, I issued an Incident Report for Complaint # 13-005, finding a violation of the Employment Plan with the Office of the Public Defender's intern program. The Bureau of Human Resources Report was issued on December 30, 2013. To date, the parties have had discussions regarding this matter, but a resolution has not yet been finalized. The Public Defender's website has been revamped and I anticipate a final resolution of the matter during the next reporting period.

Please note that I have not received a Request for Documents during this reporting period.

Interns/Externs:

Intern/Extern placements outside of general hiring process are closely monitored. There have been 47 interns placed into positions at the County and, in each instance, the academic institution or non-political organization has submitted

the No Political Consideration Certification and has been fully compliant with the process. The number of interns does not include interns who are part of the Internship or Volunteer Program at the Office of the Public Defender. Please note that Departments are becoming more aware that interagency agreements need to be assessed to ensure compliance with the Employment Plan.

An Intern/Extern Request and Placement Process Packet that includes guidelines, a step-by-step chart, a form and sample intern/extern opportunity postings was developed and should be implemented during the next reporting period. In the interim, the current process established in 2012 is working well.

In my last semi-annual report, I noted that the Employment Plan does not allow for one-day or one-event volunteers to provide additional assistance to Commissioners' staff at non-political events. Examples of these types of volunteers include people assisting with sign-in sheets, handing out folders and setting up chairs. The Office of the Independent Inspector General and I drafted a process to address this need and we will work on finalizing it during the next reporting period.

Executive Assistant:

There have been two Executive Assistant I positions filled in compliance with the Employment Plan.

Direct Appointment for Public Defender:

There has been one Direct Appointment filled in compliance with the Employment Plan for the position of Deputy of Financial Affairs.

A Few Observations:

Interview files are routinely reviewed when issues surface or questions posed on a variety of circumstances. Additionally, I chose ten random interview files to audit and found no issues with following the general hiring sequence.

I continue to have access to all Bureau of Human Resources files, data, reports, tracking spreadsheets, etc., and Departments continue to provide requested documentation.

An effective compliance program requires Departments and employees to actively participate in the process by posing questions, requesting advice and raising concerns. Based on the daily inquiries and communications that the Bureau of Human Resources staff and I receive, the steps in the Employment Plan and Supplemental Policies are working to provide transparency in hiring and other employment actions.

Conclusion:

The County's commitment to transparency in employment actions affecting non-exempt positions continues to be a priority. As always, I am grateful for the efforts of the President's Office, the entire Bureau of Human Resources staff, the Compliance Administrator's Office, the Office of the Independent Inspector General and the County Auditor in providing assistance in my monitoring activities.

Sincerely yours,



Letitia Dominici

cc: Tracey R. Ladner, Bureau of Human Resources
Laura Lechowicz Felicione, Office of the President